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Yurchenko cleared to go back home

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Vitaly Yurchenko, the Soviet KGB agent who one day earlier renounced his "defection" to the United States, yesterday was

granted permission to return to Moscow.

The former head of the Soviet intelligence agency's North American Department slipped back to the Soviet Embassy on Saturday after nearly four months in U.S. custody.

He entered the State Department's diplomatic entrance shortly before 6 last night, accompanied by four Soviet officials, for a half-hour meeting in which he repeated his desire to return to the Soviet Union.

"As a result of that meeting, the United States government has decided that Mr. Yurchenko's decision to return to the Soviet Union was made of his own free will and he is now free to leave the United States," State Department spokesman Charles Redman said last night.

Mr. Redman said the meeting was held "in an atmosphere free of the possibility of Soviet coercion."

"We made it clear to Mr. Yurchenko that if he wished to remain in the United States, he was free to do so," Mr. Redman said. "In that case, he would not be subject to detention of any kind by U.S. authorities, nor would he be re-

turned to the custody of the Soviets."

Mr. Redman repeated earlier State Department denials of Mr. Yurchenko's allegations that he was kidnapped and drugged by the CIA.

"None of the charges had any foundation," Mr. Redman said.

As he left the State Department last night, Mr. Yurchenko answered, "Yes, home," when asked if he would return to the Soviet Union.

In an extraordinary news conference Monday at the Soviet Embassy compound on Tunlaw Road NW, Mr. Yurchenko told reporters he "escaped" from CIA security officials who were holding him at a house in rural Virginia.

Those charges were denied by the White House, the State Department and by members of congressional intelligence committees. In addition, Mr. Yurchenko's claims received a skeptical reception from private intelligence experts.

At the White House, spokesman Larry Speakes said the Yurchenko incident would not affect the administration's attitude toward President Reagan's summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva in two weeks.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz said last night that the Yurchenko affair was widely publicized on Soviet television and came up during discussions of human rights issues with Mr. Gorbachev.

"For our part, we're proceeding to the summit with the seriousness of purpose that we've always had in an effort to resolve differences between the United States and the Soviet Union," he said.

Mr. Redman characterized yesterday's State Department meeting as "completely businesslike" and said Mr. Yurchenko repeated several times that he wished to return to the Soviet Union. He made the decision of his own free will and said he was not pressured by Soviet officials, Mr. Redman said.

Six State Department officials, led by William Woessner, acting as-

sistant secretary for European and Canadian affairs, took part in the meeting. A government doctor certified that Mr. Yurchenko did not appear to be under the influence of drugs, although no medical tests were performed, Mr. Redman said.

A government official, who spoke on condition he not be named, said FBI agents who had been involved in Mr. Yurchenko's interrogation were not with him Saturday when he claimed to have escaped.

"We didn't have anybody with him on Saturday," the official told United Press International. "The CIA was still working with him."

Apparently, the CIA had not reported to the Justice Department or the FBI that Mr. Yurchenko had dropped out of sight that day, the official said.

"They hadn't advised us he'd left," the official said. "We learned about it when reporters called after being told by the Soviet Embassy."

On Capitol Hill, CIA officials briefed the Senate Intelligence Committee on the case last night and a committee spokesman said Mr. Yurchenko disappeared during a Saturday night dinner at a Georgetown restaurant.

"It's fair to say the committee felt security was very lax [and] we have asked that a thorough review of [CIA] procedures be done by somebody . . . who has had nothing to do with this case," the spokesman said. He said the CIA promised to undertake the review and report back to the committee.

A State Department official, in a background interview, said Mr. Yurchenko was never confined against his will and was permitted "loose contact" freedom to go almost anywhere he chose.

"He wasn't being 'guarded,'" the official said. "From the moment of his entry into the U.S., he enjoyed almost the full rights and freedom as anybody else. U.S. authorities offered him protection at his own request," the official added.

If Mr. Yurchenko had expressed an interest in returning to the Soviet Union at any time during his stay in the United States, "he wouldn't have been hindered from doing so," the official said.



The back yard of a Morrisville, Va., house believed to be the place defector Vitaly Yurchenko stayed with the CIA. Photo by Carol T. Powers. The Washington Times